Sample answers French revolution test

1. Identify the major social groups in France on the eve of the 1789 Revolution. Assess the extent to which their aspirations were achieved in the period from the meeting of the Estates-General (1789) to the declaration of the republic (September 1792).

There were three major social groups on France who were involved in the Revolution. The 3 estates consisting of clergy, nobility, and everyone else each had their own complaints and aspirations for a better country in the future. Out of the three classes, only the goals of the third estate were ultimately met, as the First and Second estates were abolished.

The Second Estate, or the nobility, wanted to keep their high status in the bureaucracy while the third estate suffered. The second estate wanted to be exempt from all taxes while still keeping privileges, such as the sumptuary laws. There laws differentiated the nobility from the thirds estate by the types of clothes they were allowed to wear. Between the meeting of the Estates General and the declaration of the republic, the idea of the higher 2 estates was eradicated and the nobles did not get what they wanted. The National Assembly, consisting of mostly the 3rd estate, established the Declaration of the Rights of Man, making everyone equal under the law. The new constitutional government was not what the nobility wished for because their privileges were now shared with everyone. The execution of the monarch and the establishment of the National Assembly did not meet the nobility’s and clergy’s aspirations. (Mrs. An says – I would add that the 2nd estate wanted to force the king to call the estates general to ensure their power over the king – although they got what they wanted, the king did call the estates general, it did not bring the 2nd estate the power they wanted, it actually reduced their power.)

On the other hand, the 3rd Estate’s mission to revolutionize France was virtually successful by the declaration of the republic (Mrs. An says, this was not their mission!, they really just wanted some political voice and to bring some tax parity to France as this author says next sentence). This estate, consisting of the merchants (bourgeoisie), rural peasants, and sand-culottes wanted lower taxes and more food. The bread shortage after the Icelandic volcano (excellent outside info) was too much for the Parisian women, as they marched into the market places of Paris and to Versailles in protest of the lack of food (October Days). Eventually, after the Tennis Court Oath and the establishment of the National Assembly, order and equality were restored. The heavy tax burden was lifted and more income could be used on food. The nobility no longer had special privileges, just like the 3rd estate wanted. The Republic and the Declaration of the Rights of Man supported the 3rd estate’s cause. The issue of voting by head v. by order was no longer relevant as the estates were ended. The goals of the Third Estate were met by the establishment of the republic and the National Assembly in France.

The three estates, the clergy, the nobility, and the populous had different aspirations as to what would come out of the French Revolution. Although some of the nobility participated in the process, only the third estate achieved most of their goals. As the first two classes were dismissed, the third estate gained the most power in the fight against the abusive upper classes. Between the meeting of the Estates General and the declaration of the republic, the third estate got what they wished while the first two estates miserably failed in the attempt to revolutionize France (but revolutionizing France was not the goal of any of them).

1. *“The essential cause of the French Revolution was the collision between a powerful, rising bourgeoisie and an entrenched aristocracy defending its privileges.”*

Assess the validity of this statement as an explanation of the events leading up to the French Revolution of 1789.

The French Revolution can be said to be caused by the “collision between a powerful rising bourgeoisie and an entrenched aristocracy defending its privileges.” In fact, this revolution was created by the powerful Bourgeoisie taking a political and social stand; but they would never have been able to do so if the aristocracy had not tried defending its privileges.

Politically, the aristocracy’s motions enabled the Bourgeoisie to demand more power and equality. When the French king asked to raise the noble’s taxes at a minor meeting due to the horrible economy, the nobles took the king’s desperation to their advantage and forced him into calling the Estates General in order to discuss this issue. Truthfully, they wanted an Estates General to be called because this gives them the power to make decisions for the country and gain more privileges. However, the Bourgeoisie also took this calling to their advantage. They wanted more power too and in order to achieve this, they demanded to meet together and vote by head instead of by order because the third estate had the most people so if they voted by head, the third estates vote would definitely win. Since the king refused though, the third estate, who are now thinking they have the ability to defend their rights because they saw how the nobles were able to manipulate the king and thus they should also be able to manipulate him, decide to take a bigger step into creating a revolution by making the Tennis Court Oath. In this, they promise to stick together and defend each other against the kind and create their own government called the national assembly which speaks for all the people, even peasants. So because the nobles forced the king to call and Estates General, the third estate decided that they can also force the king to do things for their own benefit including voting by head and then they went further by rebelliously making their own government.

Additionally, the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie helped incite the French Revolution because of their ongoing fight for power and dominance (nobles over 3rd estate). Because the nobles continued forcing the king to tax their workers – third estate – instead of them the third estate began getting angry thus preparing them to take a stand for their rights. Also the hunting grounds and pants reserved for nobles angered the 3rd estate even further causing certain 3rd estate people to finally speak out. That is when a pamphlet was written speaking of what the third estate really is. This pamphlet proved how the third estate is the body of France and thus should be treated better. This incited even more thought of creating a revolution. Then women too wrote the document, the rights of women, demanding the revolutionary idea of women’s rights. Overall, because the aristocracy maintained such high dominance and privileges over the third estate, the third estate was beginning to get angry enough to start a revolution and because the 3rd estate began speaking out for having their rights, revolutionary ideas promoting revolution acts spread further.

Because the nobles showed that the king is politically weak, the third estate realized they could take a stand politically and because the nobles took so much power over the third estate socially, the third estate began demanding more equal rights. Overall, the nobility’s actions along with the third estate’s actions created a mental shift in the people’s view of their country and how it was ruled. The idea that the people can revolutionize France making it better for everyone was now very popular causing people to take action and create the French Revolution.

(Mrs. An says – some of this has long sentences (it is written under time pressure and testing), and it can get a bit confusing but this is ok for a test. It connects the second and third estates in a causal way and that was the question, it makes conclusions rather than list what happened, it tells the reader how the events are connected rather than letting the reader guess about implied connections).

1. Was napoleon Bonaparte the preserver of the French Revolution's key achievements or a conqueror who repudiated the principles for which the revolutionaries had stood?

After the Reign of Terror, Napoleon Bonaparte rose to power in France with his many successes in the battlefield and his perseverance. He did not grow up in a noble home which most likely led to many of his beliefs as ruler. While some argue that Napoleon was a modern dictator who repudiated the ideas of the French Revolution, he was truthfully a preserver of the French Revolution with his economic, political, and cultural reforms.

Napoleon’s political and economic reforms were based on the French Revolution (Mrs. An says – this is key, the author makes very clear that what he did was revolutionary, this is not just a list of what he did). One cause of the revolution was due to France’s plummeting economy and the heavy taxes on the third estate. Napoleon created the National Bank of France which significantly reduced the amount of debt from the funding of the American Revolution and the Palace of Versailles. He also leveled the taxes more so the peasants were not paying 80% of their income to the state. His economic changes go hand in hand with the Revolution because Napoleon is clearly trying to Help France recover from its issues rather than taking over for selfish reasons. Politically, Napoleon instituted the Napoleonic Code which stated that men were equal. The Code was based on the idea of equality, liberty, and fraternity – the motto of the French Revolution. While at the same time the Napoleonic Code excluded women’s rights, the fundamental of the code outweigh any doubt that Napoleon was not a revolutionary.

In addition to Napoleon’s economic and political polices, his cultural policies also went along with the same principle of equality, liberty, fraternity. Napoleon believed that one should not be judged and hired for a job based on class (birth) rather than merit. A noble would no longer become a government official because of his title, he would have to earn it. When Napoleon began expanding and conquering other nations, he abolished feudalism in those territories. This goes along with the ideas of the French Revolution because equality was what the Revolution was all about and that’s what Napoleon tried to accomplish as ruler. He also believed that everyone deserved a secondary education so he made it possible for all social classes to be educated in lycees. Socially, Napoleon went along the lines of the French Revolution and what the people wanted in their grievances at the time of Louis XVI.

Overall, Napoleon modeled after the French Revolution in his ideas about the economy, politics, and law, and culturally and socially. While he might have veered from the principles, he ultimately did everything for the improvement of France and their dominance throughout the entire continent. Napoleon received France in one of the worst time periods and he managed to turn it around again to make it prosper once again. Even though some of the things he did could arguably be for his own personal gain, he truthfully stayed with France and keeping with the ideas of the Revolution that he restored people’s nationalism and made France a better place to live. (Mrs. An says – I think the conclusion goes off track from my usual directions and from the question asked but that is ok, AP may like this analysis and there is a clear thesis in the intro).